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DECORATION & FURNITURE



HINTS ON CHURCH EMBROIDERY.

CHURCH embroidery has received much attention at all times, and of late years particularly, and with ever-improving results. Many works of true art have been produced, many also that have fallen lamentably short of that standard.

The general rules for the design and coloring of decorative needlework for our homes, will also apply to that which is intended for the glory of God in the beautifying of His house. This last has narrower limitations, stricter laws of fitness, bonds of symbolism, rules of color, and traditions of style; but a student of art needlework will not find that these stricter laws prevent church work from being beautiful and harmonious; indeed, they will be aids rather than hindrances, while the knowledge of general principles of color and design will be a safeguard against placing vulgar, crude, or tasteless combinations where, in many eyes, they would be not only ugly but irreverent.

Church needlework differs only from secular work in its design, which is subject to the limitations spoken of above, and in its special application, which makes it the highest effort of needle-work. If a faithful apprenticeship has been served to secular work, it is only needful to apply the same principles to suitable designs in order to fit the work for the highest purpose to which it can be devoted. Instead of merely reproducing ancient work, which is often too cramped and archaic to suit modern churches, it will be better to employ the increased skill of modern times in designing work that shall be new and original, and yet within the fitting limits and chastened reserve of ecclesiastical embroidery.

In designing this kind of work there are double reasons why colors should be grave and rich rather than harsh or crude: unity of design and harmony of color take a new and deeper meaning, honesty of workmanship becomes a duty, and a new reason for conventionalism is seen when we remember that we ourselves, when in God's house, lay aside an ordinary and natural demeanor. It may not be amiss to warn the reader against some of the mistakes that are most frequently committed. One of these is the abuse of symbolism, as when symbols are wrongly used or put in wrong places. The most holy signs and names are often seen placed where they will be leaned against, knelt on, or even stood upon; or emblems are seen in positions of the highest dignity which should properly occupy only secondary places.

A more common fault, the result of a more common ignorance, is to suppose that precious materials, excellent workmanship, and even good coloring will atone for the absence of a thoughtful and well-balanced design; this is to endeavor to build without a foundation. A piece of work seen by the writer may be held up as a warning. It was an "antependium," or pulpit frontal, the material of which was cream-white silk. The border was of pale pink roses, with their stems and leaves on a ground of olive green, well treated and well worked. In the centre was a red cross bordered with gold, in harmony with the border, well proportioned, and rightly telling as the principal point. This would have been very good had this been all, and had the white ground been left plain as a relief to the eye, or worked with a diaper to give it increased richness, but it was encumbered with a heavy scroll above the cross, shaded with a cold inharmonious gray, and inscribed with black letters that made the sharpest contrast in the whole work. Below the cross were a large fleur-de-lys and a highly conventionalized rose, both in gold-colored silk, exquisitely worked, but quite out of place, overloading and confusing the design.

Good work may be done for churches by many who are uninstructed in the details of the richer kinds of work;

but they should content themselves with the humbler rather than the more ambitious objects. Besides these last, which from the dignity of their position and the richness of their materials require special skill and undivided attention, there are many articles the decoration of which may be confided to less practised hands. Kneeling-cushions and foot-mats have been partly rescued from the dominion of cross-stitch, and are frequently embroidered or made in applied work of excellent design and color. More seldom, but occasionally, we have seen embroidered colossal hangings and door curtains, which are much more beautiful and valuable than any loom work, upholstery, or the stamped designs most commonly used for these purposes.

To all these articles the rules of design and color, given in earlier articles, will easily be applied, often more easily than in work intended for house decoration, because of the broader and simpler surroundings and equally distributed light of a church; while the varied and constantly changing uses and aspects of an ordinary room multiply the difficulties of arranging forms and colors for its decoration.

PIANO-BACK DECORATIONS.

UPRIGHT pianos are now seldom placed with their backs to the wall as of old; but they are brought out and made to look as attractive as possible. A piano seen the other day had a wreath of blue harebells, with abundance of leaves, worked all round the edge, and in the centre three lines of music, painted in black, four or five inches wide. The material was white crash, and it was tightly stretched over a wooden frame. At each corner was a good-sized medallion, worked round in gold-colored filoselle, and in this was embroidered a musical instrument, such as a harp, violin, trumpet, and flute in shaded brown silks. At the top, in the centre, was a cluster of bells, attached by a red ribbon, hanging different lengths. These were worked in shades of gray. The design was appropriate and effective.

Oriental embroidered stuffs are particularly well suited for draping over the back of a piano. India shawls and Indian chintzes are used in the same way. Sometimes the backs are entirely covered with tightly stretched serge or momie cloth or crash, with a showy pattern in crewels all over. White muslin pieces embroidered in silk and gold and silver—Oriental goods—are perhaps the most fashionable of all, and as these are rarely very large some skill is required to arrange four or five together. The large cranes, and flocks of birds, embroidered in silk and gold thread on satin imported from Japan, look handsome. In England many ladies use their costly China crape shawls thus draped on pianos.

The following is a novel arrangement, which has been successfully adopted: Cut out the size required in white momie cloth or black ribbed serge (both of which are wide materials); lay on at the edge, top and bottom, a strip of red satin sheeting, cut on one side in deep vandykes, measuring some eight or nine inches. These vandykes point toward the centre, and must all be of the same size, and fit in between each other and not directly opposite. The edges are chain-stitched, and cut away, and a herringbone pattern worked all round in red crewel or silk of the same shade as the sheeting. Along the centre of the piano-back, between the two rows of points, an undulating design of ivy leaves should be sketched and worked in red crewels or silk, a few leaves straying away into the spaces between the points. Red in particular is mentioned, because the writer is describing a piano-back at present before her; but this idea can be carried out in any colors, to suit the furniture of the room it is intended for. Brown velvet or velveteen on light blue serge, worked with brown silk, and a design of silk in shaded browns, with a few touches of dark red, or dark red velvet, on a lighter red ground of either momie, or oatmeal cloth, or serge,

worked with gold-colored silk, would look most effective. If still more ornamentation is required, a small pattern could be worked on the points. If the piano is of the ordinary size, about a yard and a half would be sufficient of the material for the two strips of points, splitting it in half, and about the same for the foundation.

WALL PAINT AND PAPER.

THERE are three methods, says an intelligent writer in an English magazine, commonly adopted for covering and decorating wall spaces—plain color in paint, paper, or distemper; patterns in paper, textile fabrics, or paint; and panelling. If the first method be employed, all the interest of the wall-surfaces is made to depend upon color. There can be no objection to this; a plain surface of color may be a beautiful thing provided it be adapted for its purpose. But unfortunately it is in rare exceptions only that we find walls of suitable tones. Those most usually used are pale green and yellowish drab. It will be said that these are harmless; and, to a certain extent, this defence is true. But it must be borne in mind that the harmless is not a very high ideal to aspire to, and that it is this inability in most of us to make our walls better than harmless that drives us to seek relief in vast-sized mirrors or other coarse decorations to give some life to our rooms. If we are fortunate enough to possess good pictures the problem is simple. All we have to do is to paint, paper, or distemper the walls with such a tint as shall form a good background, without interfering with the pictures. A rich brownish green will be found one of the best for this purpose. If, however, we have no pictures, or very few, we must depend on the beauty of our wall-decorations themselves. Now, if we call to mind the colors that we have seen on the walls in our friends' houses, is there any one among them that ever gave us an even momentary feeling of interest or pleasure? Some, as we said before, are harmless, that is to say, entirely uninteresting; but for the most part they are actually aggressive by their extreme crudeness. There is one, for instance, very much like that of lavender kid gloves, that is used often in distemper and paint, and mixed with pure white or white and gold in papers. The effect is one of astonishing repulsiveness. It possesses no brilliancy, no depth, no warmth, no interest or beauty of any kind. It is unsuitable for pictures, and clashes with almost every tint that is brought near to it.

The only thing that can be done in this matter is to appeal to every one's own taste as far as possible, and to try and make them exercise their judgment. Do not let us be content, on the one hand, with gloominess and dulness; let us avoid with horror, on the other hand, all crudeness and mere showiness. Let us be careful that the color chosen shall be one not merely beautiful in small quantities, as for instance scarlet or bright blue, but suitable to covering large spaces, and sufficiently quiet to be a permanent rest to the eyes.

When wall-papers printed in patterns are used, there are further considerations which should guide our choice. It should be borne in mind, however, that although in these cases more than one color is employed, yet there is a general effect of harmonious blending of tone together which should be sought after, an effect best seen at such a distance that the pattern ceases to be very distinct. This general effect is analogous to one tint, and should be considered in the same light. Many papers when viewed from certain distances give undue prominence to one particular feature, owing to its color not being in proper harmony with those of the other features of the design; and the constant repetition of the pattern over the wall-surface often causes the prominent features to be arranged in lines and figures in themselves unpleasing, though all the lines and figures of the design unpeated may be faultless. Before a wall-paper is chosen, therefore, care should be taken that two or three breadths are placed side by side